

*Coffeehouse* *N<sup>o</sup> 203*  
A N  
E S S A Y  
O N  
D E I S M;

O R, A  
PANEGYRICK upon the WITS of  
the TOWN.

Inscrib'd to the RIGHT HONOURABLE  
*Robert Lord Romney.*

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*Protinus irrumpit venæ peioris in ævum  
Omne nefas : fugere pudor, verumque, fidesque :  
In quorum subiere locum fraudesque dolique  
Insidiæque, & vis, & amor sceleratus habendi.*

OVID.

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By a GENTLEMAN of Kent.

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To the RIGHT HONOURABLE

*Robert Lord Romney.*

My LORD,

I BEG Pardon, for presuming to inscribe this Essay to your Lordship, without requesting your Consent. I have been perswaded to publish it, by Persons who think it may possibly be of Service ; and as I would, follow Custom, in Things which are not detrimental, I am desirous my Work should have a Patron ; and One who has always DARED openly to distinguish himself, by his Precept and Example, as a real Friend to the Cause of Virtue and revealed Religion. I would,

## DEDICATION.

contribute if possible, towards laughing a Set of People into a right Way of thinking, upon whom Argument can never prevail. The Goodness of the Intention, I flatter myself, will plead my Pardon in the Eyes of your Lordship, for the Liberty which I have taken; and I beg Leave to subscribe myself, with the greatest Respect,

*My Lord,*

*Your Lordship's most obedient,*

*And most sincere,*

*Humble Servant,*

*Kent, Jan. 1753.*

**The AUTHOR.**



## ADVERTISEMENT.

I HAVE but a mean Opinion of an Author's real Modesty, who ushers the Child of his Brain into the World, especially if it is his First-born, with great Diffidence of his Abilities, and a Consciousness of his Inequality to the Task ; hoping to get a favourable Opinion of his Humility.

He who thinks his Writings can neither improve, nor divert his Readers, ought certainly never to print them : If he imagines they may answer one or other of those Ends, there needs no Apology. The Author of this Essay, Oration, Rhapsody, Theme, or whatever Name it deserves, wrote it only for his own Amusement, to pass away a long Winter's Evening in the Country, and like all young Writers, he was easily perswaded to print it ; though  
whether

## ADVERTISEMENT.

whether by his Friends, or Enemies, he is dubious. But, if the *Inspector*, the Wits of the *Temple*, the *Bedford*, *George's* near the Bar, and the young Men with Tossels, do but declare in its Favour, as for the rest of Mankind,

*Odi profanum Vulgus, & arceo.*

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A N  
E S S A Y  
O N  
D E I S M.

**I**T is a common Observation, that the World, through all the later Ages, has been equally vicious; and therefore, that the present Race of Mankind, is equally as virtuous as the former. A Position, which the Experience of every one, who knew the World but thirty Years ago, must be able to refute; and compel him to allow, that Luxury and Prophaneness abound at present beyond the Example of any former Times. Is not the open Commission of every

every Immorality by the great and little Vulgar ; the undauntedly avowing, nay, even glorying in Things irregular, by all Ranks of People, a Demonstration to what a superior Height of FOLLY we have climbed?

What Latitude do those PRETTY GENTLEMEN, who call themselves, THE TOWN, or People in High Life, \* allow of in Discourse, in external Appearance and Behaviour, as well as in Domestic and private Life? Are not Acts of Debauchery the prevailing and admired Topic of their Conversations? Nay, are there not many Men of liberal Education, as it is called, and who are even far advanced in Life, who yet introduce upon all Occasions, loose and dissolute Discourse? And it even seems by Length of Habit, to be absolutely necessary to their very Existence. †

Is not every young Gentleman, upon his first Appearance in Company, laugh'd out of his Principles of Virtue, and a serious

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\* I don't mean any of the young or old Club,

† I don't mean any of the *Kentish* Justices.

Regard



Regard to Decency and Religion? The Youth who so supinely permits himself to be cheated (or thus gambled) \* out of his Principles, becomes a Devotee to every Vice which the Connoisseurs in Debauchery can strike out. † The middling and lower Classes of Life, ape the more elevated; ‖ not only in those Vices which it is called Taste to pursue, but in all their Follies, Fopperies and Absurdities. The Inferior eagerly follows the Superior thro' all the Scenes of Wickedness, and Profligacy; nay, they are so intoxicated with Fashion, that they will entail Infamy and Distemper as well as Poverty upon their Posterity, to appear in the Mode; even often for a Pleasure, of which they have neither Taste nor Relish. One would imagine, that Man was constituted for no other End, but to play apish Tricks, and riot away Time

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\* Or T—ff—'d.

† I don't mean to offend the Companies at the *King's-Arms*, or *Thatch'd-House*.

‖ The *Temple Beaux*, the *Beaux of St. James's*.

ADDISON.

*ad æternum* in various Scenes of Nonsense, and Inconsistency. Pleasure, and Pleasure only, engrosses and enslaves the Thought of almost every Man; and few indeed, consider the noble Purposes for which they were created. Man certainly looks upon himself as a Being accidentally slipt down from the Clouds; therefore, without Impropriety, that he may give the Reins to his Passions, and indulge every idle Humour.\*

Why should he consider, that the Design of God in the Formation of Man, was to raise a Creature endowed with Reason for a Guide, and that when he abused it, God gave him his revealed Word, made authentic and sealed by the Life and Death of his Son? Yet, these Wretches won't be perswaded, that they are to stand or fall, according to the Use they make of such reasonable Injunctions. § These *Latitudinarians* are become so formidable a Body of late, that I am informed, they often gain a General Officer; Aid de Camps

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\* I don't mean *F. B. D—l*, Esq; who was at 1000 *l.* Expence to be laugh'd at.

don't mean to affront Mother *Osborn*.

very frequently ; a sapient Physician ; \* sometimes a Merchant ; t'other End of the Town Tradesmen in Abundance ; but they value themselves that in General their Society consists of Gentlemen. Were there not such Pests to human Society, would not Virtue and Self-denial gain Esteem ? But as Things are now, we value no Man for his Probity ; we caress him, as he contributes to our Entertainment, by Drollery or Humour, by offering Incense to our Foibles, or by forwarding, or partaking of our Vices.

Who cares whether a Man is endowed with Principles of Justice or Honour ? Who minds the Integrity of his Heart, so much as the Froth, and volubility of his Tongue ? † We love the Man who prostitutes his Conscience in Compliance to the Genius and Complexion of his Company.

What tremendous Judgments may we not expect, when it is unpolite and ungenteel

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\* See Sir *Hans Sloan's* Will, at the Beginning.

† I don't mean to reflect on the Applause that has been given to the Abilities and the Writings of the late Lord *Bolingbroke*.



to be a rational Creature ! What a Metamorphosis is here, from a Creature made after the Image of his Creator, and endowed with Talents to imitate the glorious Examples set before us, to a Brute ; distinguished only from the Natural Brute, by the Erectness of his Figure, and by having the Ascendency of his fellow Brutes, so as to make them contribute to his Ease, Appetite, and Pleasure ! I know no other Way of accounting for such an horrid Abuse of all that is sacred and valuable, for such stupendous Folly, but the universal Prevalency of Deism and Irreligion, and that epidemical Pride of Man to be thought wiser than what is written.

The Youth whose Vanity leads him to a Desire of playing the Orator amongst his Companions at the Coffee-house, or the Tavern, collects together the most sophistical Arguments of *Tindal*, *Toland*, *Woolston*, *Hobbes*, and the *Answer* to the Tryal of the Witnesses ; and big with the great Discovery he has made,  
and



and convinced how much wiser he is than the queer sober Party, (his Imagination thus teeming with Nothings) he expatiates against the Tyranny of the Priest: He says, to be sure, the Christian System is a good State-engine, and all Governments have some established Religion, which by Power and Finesse they impose upon the Rabble; and so by their Nomination of those who are to explain this System, they Hoodwink the People in General into a Set of Principles, calculated to support the Authority of the Government.

But, alas! how do these Men stand confounded and abashed from Head to Foot, when a Man comes to talk to 'em after some such Manner as this. Pray, Gentlemen, consider a little coolly and calmly with yourselves. You call the Christian Religion, Priestcraft, and an Engine of State; but, Gentlemen, this is doing Religion more Honour than you yourselves, may perhaps intend; for in calling it an Engine of State, you do of Course allow it to be  
*useful*

*useful* in the good Government and Regulation of Mankind ; but, does it follow, that it is a Cheat and a Falshood, only because it is useful, and necessary to the World ? No, surely.

Besides, Gentlemen ; how in the Name of Nonsense can *that* Religion be called an Engine of civil Government, when 'tis notorious to all Men (whose Reading has extended beyond their Primmers) that the civil Government of the World, nay—of the wisest, politest, and most learned Part of the World (I mean the *Roman* Empire) did, for three hundred Years after the first preaching of Christianity, make Use of all the potent Arguments that could be drawn, either from Wit, or Learning, or Lies, or Whips, or Halters, or Gridirons, to stop the Progress of this very Religion, which you, Gentlemen, call an Engine of State. Curious arguing indeed, to call *that* Religion an Engine of State, when the State did, at the same Time, make Use of every Engine in their Power, to suppress it in  
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its very Birth ! And pray, Gentlemen, what Solution can be given of its coming—not only to its Birth, but also to its present State of Maturity, Strength and Manhood, but the irresistible Force of Truth ? I say, the Force of Truth, Gentlemen ; which always is great, and never fails, in Length of Time, to prevail over the Sophistry and Nonsense, as well as the Vice, and Pride, and Folly of Mankind,

But pray, Gentlemen, indulge me a Moment longer ; and don't begin to skrew up your Faces into such intollerable Marks of Impatience. You know, your Friend *Jack*, has in his Time, practised some of the Follies of King *Solomon* ; 'tis but fair then, that you should allow him, for a Minute or two, to copy after his Wisdom.

Let us then examine candidly, your Charge of Priestcraft, so often brought against the Religion of this Country. Now, Gentlemen, whenever the Word Craft is applied to Priests, it certainly denotes, that  
Priests



Priests are crafty Men. If then they are truly crafty, they must aim at getting either Wealth, or Honour, or Power, by their Craft; and if Christianity be all Priestcraft, (as you affirm) then, this must have been the Aim of all Priests from the first Days of Christianity, down to the present Times.

Now Gentlemen I allow that in the present Times, a Priest may get both Honour and Wealth and Power by his Profession; because, *now* he is paid by the Public for preaching up his Religion. But, pray, *what* Religion does he now preach up? Why, he preaches up that very same Religion which his Predecessors taught for the first three hundred Years after Christ. And what did *those* Priests get by teaching it? Why—they got Poverty, Disgrace, Tortures, and cruel Deaths; and they knew their Fate beforehand, and expected no other. And pray, where lay the worldly Craft of preaching up a Doctrine, which they knew they should be so badly paid for? I allow with all my Heart, that many of  
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the present Race of Clergy, may, for ought I know, be encouraged to preach up their Religion, for the Lucre of Ale, Tobacco, Pigs, or fat Geese ; but what's all that to the Purpose ? What Objection is that to the Truth of the Religion they maintain ? For if their Religion be *false*, because they now-a-days get something by preaching it ; by the same Argument it must follow, that this very same Religion was *true*, when it was preach'd up by the first Race of Clergy, because *they* got much worse than nothing at all by it. So that, Gentlemen, your Argument stands thus ; the Christian Religion is a Cheat and an Imposture, first, because they who first taught it, got worse than Nothing by it ; and secondly, because they who teach it now, get *something* by it. And again, 'tis plain, that Christianity was at first contriv'd, barely as an Engine of civil Government, because the civil Government, for so many Ages, did all that lay in their Power to suppress it. And *now* again, 'tis all an Engine of State for a contrary Reason ; because, the Government favours and protects it. Gentlemen, the Man that is humbugg'd out of his Religion by such Objections as these, is a Fool and a Cully

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with

with a Vengeance. Here, you may suppose, I am interrupted by these Sons of Mirth and Jollity. Zounds *Jack*, says one, you preach over your Liquor;—the Man is Priest-ridden;—Put the Bottle about, says another. But pray, Gentlemen, says I, hear me a Moment longer, You talk of Priest-craft. I know, that there is such a Thing; because, I have heard enough of it in Popish Countries: And Men, you say, may be Priest-ridden. Very true; but then you forget that Men may also be Deist-ridden, and Vice-ridden, and Folly-ridden, as well as Priest-ridden. Let us therefore coolly and calmly consider, what it properly is to have ones Understanding *ridden*? Now, I apprehend, that 'tis only *that* Man is ridden in his Understanding, who suffers himself to be imposed upon, either by his *own* Prejudices or Vices, or by the Sophistry, Ignorance, or Falsehoods of *another*. If therefore, a Man is imposed, on either by his own Ignorance, Vices, Follies, or Prejudices, or by those of any other Man, —why, then 'tis plain, that such a Man's Understanding is every Jot as severely hack'd and ridden Post, as if he were  
kick'd

kick'd and Spur-gauled by a Priest. And now, Gentlemen, I leave it to your own calm Reflection, whether or no you would have plunged yourselves into such ridiculous Absurdities, as you have just now advanced, if some of the Jockeys I have lately named, had not mounted the Saddle of your Understanding ?

However, notwithstanding such reasoning as this,——it often happens, that the free-thinking Youth, tickled by the Applause of his Companions, though, perhaps, endowed with good natural Talents, becomes a foolish and obnoxious Animal ; he hugs himself in his Wisdom, and is anxious of letting into the Secret those of his Acquaintance, who follow the old foolish and cowardly Way of saying Prayers, and going to Church. If one of the Company has Courage enough to speak in Defence of Revelation, the general Cry is, I am really concerned for you Sir ; I always looked upon you as a sensible Fellow ; but as to this Point, I must say, you are not in the SECRET ; why, to be sure, it's well enough and



excusable in the old Women, and lower Sort of People ; to be Priest-ridden. Our Grandmothers, considering their Age, cannot be expected to get the better of vulgar Prejudices, and the combined Artifices of the Priest and the Statesman ; but for a young Fellow of Taste to be so humbugg'd, indeed *Jack*, I blush for you ; prithee look a little further into Things ; *Pope* says, you know, a little Learning is a dangerous Thing ; read *Tindal*, a Man of an uncommon Reach of Understanding upon my Soul ; he jump'd with me in every Argument and every Thought. The Waiter is then ordered to bring in a Bible, which he could not procure, if one of the Housemaids, who had been but a Month out of *Yorkshire*, and trudged on Foot with a small one in her Pocket, did not consent to lend him hers. It being produced, my Hero says, Now Sir, you see here in the Bible, God hardeneth the Heart of *Pharaoh* to betray the Children of *Israel* ; yet poor *Pharaoh* suffers, is spifflicated ; what Stuff is this ? Pray Sir, if God hardens the Heart, does not *Pharaoh* act under an absolute

absolute Necessity? Where's your free Agency here? yet, Sir, there are People enough so absur'd as to swallow such incoherent Nonsense.\* It's really surprizing; I do not find in any Thing else, that People are so willing to be led by the Nose! Why, even a wrangling Limb of the Law, or a conceited Apothecary, (either of whom will split a Hair, *ad infinitum*,) if you have the Assurance to contradict him; I say, even such a Fellow allows himself quietly to be Priest-ridden, and swallows Creeds and Absolutions, as greedily as the Parson swallows the Punch of the Squire.—Thus,

A Deist plumes himself upon an Argument, that has but a plausible, or the minutest Appearance of Reason; and perswades himself that *Tindal's* Philosophy is so weighty, conclusive, and unanswerable, that it is not worth his While to kill Time in reading *Sherlock*, *L—n*; and *West*; or any other Author, of a refined and great Understanding. As

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\* The same wise Objections are made to many other Passages, through the same Ignorance of the Language in which the Bible was written.

for old *London*, he says, it is his Trade, and *West* and *L——n* are Men of too much Sense to believe what they write ; it's with a political View to be sure, they have drawn their Pens. Can it be supposed, that a Man of *George L——n's* Education and great Abilities can be humm'd in that Manner ? I know the idle Story of his giving Ear to the Insinuations of his first Wife ; it must be very high to see how he laughs in his Sleeve at the Credulity of the Mob and the Fools. The Governed should never credit what a Governor writes or says ; for the Governor's whole Life is spent in planning Designs to enslave the Understanding, and to plunder the Property of the Governed ; and you know *Jack, L——'s* one of the Ministry. Now, can you be such an Ass as to believe, that every Sentiment in his *M——y*, is real, and from his Heart ? Puh ! to let you into the Secret, he no more wrote his own Sentiments in that, than when he wrote about *Paul* ; he wrote the former to please the Women,

and



and the latter to please the Parsons, or some old Brim he had a Dependence upon.

What ! a Lord of the Treasury Priest-ridden, *Jack* ? Really I pity you, because in general, you don't want Penetration. You know the Town, you know Life. I and you have heard what every fine Woman, what all the Beau Monde have to say for themselves ; we know the Turn, the Foibles of 'em all.—Such is the Cant of the Fool, who despises the Revelation of his God. It is hardly possible, for those who have not seen the Effect of such weak and mean Stuff, to believe that even Boys, and much more Men of some Education and Understanding, can be drawn away by it. But it is to be accounted for when one reflects ;

That the Deistical Scheme gives such Latitude to the Passions, that the Youth whose Blood riots in his Veins, eagerly embraces an Hypothesis which stabs the  
Vitals

Vitals of his Religion, that he may wanton unchecked and uncontrouled by Conscience, in the Debaucheries of the Town. Nature is so frail, that the lowest Chicanery, the vilest Sophistry, will persuade a Man to part with what is troublesome to him, and to take that in its Room, which will shake Hands with the Folly and Deformity of his Heart.

**F I N I S.**